

(Washington, D.C.) - Congressman Tim Ryan (OH-17) today gave a speech at the 37th commemoration

of Kent State. The speech calls for our nation to heal but also commit ourselves to change once the War in Iraq ends. Below is a copy of the Congressman's statements as delivered:

On May 4th 1970 a place whose mission is to create, became a place of destruction. A university that began as an institution to promote knowledge became a symbol of the ignorance and futility of war. Thirty seven years ago, four students were cut down in the prime of their lives on this spot, standing up for what they believed in, and against an unjust war. Since that day, Kent State grew, and continued with its mission, yet the irony is that America never did.

Now we find ourselves fighting another unjust and questionable war, once again trying to make sense of the lives lost, those brave men like Casey Sheehan and Augie Schroeder who have served our nation honorably, and through no fault of their own, supporting an order handed down from an administration trying to achieve a political goal rather than confront a real threat to our way of life. I am here today to pay my respects to those who have fallen in Iraq, those who fell in Vietnam, and those four students who died on this hallowed ground, so that we may never find ourselves in this position ever again. Some men and women protect and defend the constitution as a member of the military. But for many, like us and the four slain students, we must fulfill our obligations in one of the most noble positions our society has: Citizen. And never is this position more demanding than in a time of war.

The parallels between Iraq and Vietnam are many. Both misguided and unjust wars, both led by stubborn Presidents and both raged forward against the will of the American people. Where these two wars differ though, is that history has yet to record how we handled the post-Iraq period. I believe we have a great opportunity for change. Just because we've had an unjust war doesn't mean we have to have an unjust peace.

The greatest tragedy of the Kent State massacre, of the Vietnam era as a whole is that our nation never healed. Our veterans from that terrible war still suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and are scarred by the indelible wounds of an experience so horrible that many were never able to recover. Our nation as a whole suffers the same wounds, wounds that never fully healed and were reopened on that fateful day in 2003 when we chose to turn our backs on the lessons of the past and embarked on a misguided venture in Iraq. Vietnam has clung to our public discourse for over forty years. It defined a generation and its politics to the point that Vietnam defined the presidential election of 2004.

The protests at Kent had one clear message: Change. Change our policy in Vietnam. Change the role of the U.S. in the world. And change the politics of manipulation. 30 years later, we still long for that change.

If we are to honor those slain students, it will be, as Lincoln said, "not by what we say here, but by what we do here." Our actions must speak louder than our rhetoric. We must draw inspiration from Allison Krause, Jeffrey Glenn Miller, Sandra Lee Scheuer and William Knox Schroeder. We must get courage from Cindy Sheehan, Rosemary Palmer and mothers like them all over the country. And we must set the course so the next generation does not repeat the mistakes of the past.

We must be vigilant in the next few months if we are going to end this occupation of Iraq. It took 31 acts of Congress to end the war in Vietnam; we must not allow it to take that long to end Iraq. We must organize and pull in groups of citizens who agree with our position, but have yet to communicate with their elected officials. We must go to the street in a non-violent way and we must continue to push for a firm timeline for withdrawal. We must start inundating elected officials with letters and phone calls and let them know that this country is a democracy and we intend to keep it that way.

And once we end this war, we can begin the work of reclaiming our country. Of getting back to the day when liberty and justice for all wasn't just used as a punch line. Where the casualties of war aren't just statistics or collateral damage. In many ways we have repeated the mistakes of Vietnam, but what we can not do is repeat the mistakes of post-Vietnam.

We must reexamine our views of peace. As President Kennedy said in his speech at American University, "Our problems are manmade-therefore, they can be solved by man and man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man's reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable and we believe they can do it again."

Our post-Iraq political and economic approach must be different. The entire way we interact with the world must change after Iraq. Our cynical and destructive political approaches must change. We can not continue with an economic system that preys on poor countries and uses workers, here and abroad, as pawns in some global economic chess match. We can not use and abuse countries for their natural resources and disregard their natural rights.

Our challenge, and the challenge of our next generation, is to create a political climate that expects peace and despises war. That expects justice and is intolerant of intolerance. That expects hope and ignores cynicism.

So, let us not repeat the sins of our fathers. Let us, "teach our children well," and through our actions and leadership post-Iraq, "let them know we love them."